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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004203

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/29/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: TOPI PROMISES MORE ALBANIAN TROOPS; SURPLUS  
MUNITIONS FOR ITO

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for Reasons 1.4(d/b)

11. (C) SUMMARY. In a December 23 meeting, Albanian President Bamir Topi told Ambassador Crocker, MNF-I CG David Petraeus and PolMil Minister Counselor Ambassador Marcie Ries that his country planned to increase the number of its troops in Iraq. Albanian Minister of Defense Fatmir Mediu, who along with Chief of the Albanian General Staff Luan Hoxha, and Diplomatic Advisor Arben Cici, also accompanied President Topi, told the CG that Albania also wished to donate surplus ammunition to Iraqi Security Forces. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) President Topi opened by describing the "special" relationship Albania wished to pursue with the United States in all fields, adding that is was the general will of the Albanian people to increase ties with the United States. On the military side, Topi noted his country's soldiers would gain valuable experience by contributing to Coalition Forces. Topi said Albania expected to "intensify operations" and increase the number of troops in the Iraq Theatre of Operations. He noted that Albania had also recently undergone many of the challenges Iraq now faces in establishing a viable democracy and acknowledged Ambassador Marcie Ries' contributions to Albania's process. The CG remarked that the Albanian forces' professionalism had earned them a special relationship with the U.S. He said attacks against Coalition assets were at one-quarter of their December 2006 level, and assured Topi that CF would continue their relentless pressure against AQI. He underscored the importance of the Mosul area (where the Albanian contingent is based) and told President Topi it would be the focus for large-scale operations in the coming months.

13. (C) The CG told Topi that Coalition Forces were increasingly successful in locating weapons caches and attributed this in part to the parallel "Iraqi Surge" that has added well over 100, 000 IA and IP since the end of 2006. He emphasized the importance of holding cleared areas and locating with the population ("you can't commute to this fight") and the critical role the approximately 75,000 Concerned Local Citizens play in this respect. The CG described AQI activity in some areas as "mafia-like" and argued that a wide array of assets, including financial, were necessary to defeat the enemy. The CG cautioned that despite the positive recent trends, the Coalition "hadn't turned a corner" and that AQI remained "tenacious."

14. (C) To Defense Minister Fatmir Mediu's question about the effect troop reductions would have on Coalition anti-terror operations, the CG answered that the Coalition had already drawn down by one Brigade Combat Team and the Marine Expeditionary Unit, but that the transition to IA oversight would be conducted in a way to minimize the risk of a resurgent AQI. The CG closed by saying that while the Coalition was increasingly transitioning security to the Iraqis, it intended fully to "remain a partner" in the process.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Crocker conceded that progress on the political front had been slow, but there had been positive developments, particularly at the local and provincial levels. He mentioned that the draft Accountability and Justice (De-Baathification) law, was scheduled to receive a third (final) reading in the Council of Representatives in early 2008. Passage of the law, he went on, would be a "significant gesture" to Iraq's Sunni community. The 2008 Budget, which he also expects to pass in early 2008, was also a welcome development because of its substantial provincial investment component. He suggested that ongoing local reconciliation initiatives combined with some national legislative gains might be enough to cement recent improvements in security. Although the process remained "slow, hard and painful," Ambassador Crocker told President Topi Iraq was in a "much better place" than it had been a year previously.

¶6. (C) Ambassador Crocker reminded President Topi that there were also "neighborhood" challenges and noted Iran's "large, but negative role." He added the USG had seen some recent "course alteration" but nothing to indicate a "cessation" of Iran's current policies. Ambassador Crocker mentioned we expected to meet the Iranians "within a week or so" for a further round of tri-lateral talks and would most like to see a "clearly defined policy shift" on their part. He cautioned that some of Iraq's other neighbors remained "suspicious" of the GOI's ties to Teheran and pointed to the complete absence of Arab Ambassadors in Baghdad as proof of this. On the Northern Border issue, the Ambassador told President Topi we were "working with the GOT" but that the key was to find a way to "eliminate the PKK without destabilizing Iraq." The Ambassador concluded that despite the "considerable challenges" remaining, he hoped an

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increasing number of positive developments would trigger a "virtuous circle" of improved security, service provision and political reconciliation.

¶7. (C) Albanian Defense Minister Fatmir Mediu said he hoped to deploy one additional 120-man company in support of Coalition activities in Mosul, and underscored his preference for committing fewer high-quality troops rather than larger numbers of less-capable soldiers. He cautioned that the measure would require the Albanian parliament's approval, but echoed President Topi's earlier message about ties with the United States and predicted easy passage. Mediu also said Albania had surplus ammunition it wanted to donate to Iraqi Security Forces and discussed transportation options with the CG.

¶8. (C) Mediu then asked Ambassador Crocker about de-baathification legislation and reconciliation progress generally; the Ambassador highlighted positive steps like the USD 75 million Anbar supplemental budget as proof the central government was reaching out to Iraq's Sunni communities. He described the recently-passed amendment to the pension law, which covers former Ba'athists, as more practically important than the increasingly "symbolic" draft De'baathification legislation pending in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. While he noted that antagonism between Prime Minister Maliki and Vice President Hashimi was an issue, he thought an up-tick in "cross-sectarian outreach," like Vice President Hashimi's trip to visit Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani in Najaf and Ammar al Hakim's trip to Anbar province were the types of initiatives improving security conditions would foster.  
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